



THE GULF OF  
MEXICO PROGRAM



Protecting and Preserving  
the Gulf of Mexico

**2016** ANNUAL REPORT  
HIGHLIGHTS



## FISCAL YEAR 2016 INVESTMENTS

LOCATION	DOLLAR AMOUNT	AGREEMENTS
Louisiana	\$740,262	2 Cooperative Agreements, 2 EJ Small Grants, 1 Interagency Agreement
Alabama	\$560,440	2 Cooperative Agreements
Texas	\$535,901	2 Cooperative Agreements
Mississippi	\$384,353	1 Cooperative Agreement, 1 EJ Small Grant, 1 Interagency Agreement
Florida	\$295,500	1 Cooperative Agreement
Gulf-wide*	\$279,353	1 Cooperative Agreement
Oklahoma	\$29,947	1 EJ Small Grant

\*One project spanning all five Gulf states (AL, FL, LA, MS, TX)

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## GMP MISSION

The EPA's Gulf of Mexico Program is focused on the **health, productivity** and **restoration** of the Gulf of Mexico and all the communities that rely on this **national resource**.



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# Who We Are

The Gulf of Mexico Program (GMP) is one of the EPA's Great Water Body Programs whose geographic focus is on the major environmental issues of the Gulf of Mexico region and its watershed.

The GMP is committed to voluntary, non-regulatory actions and solutions that are based on sound scientific and technical information as substantiated by our work with partners and the public.

## Our program consists of two teams of experienced staff:



### SCIENCE INTEGRATION AND ANALYSIS TEAM

Promoting and implementing science to benefit the Gulf of Mexico and its communities, this team assists Gulf of Mexico stakeholders by participating in activities such as periodically collecting and testing water samples in the watersheds that flow into the Gulf to monitor water quality.



### PARTNERSHIPS TEAM

Encouraging positive behavioral practices and promoting awareness of resources, technologies and environmental practices or initiatives, this team works closely with Gulf partners to identify environmental concerns and provides up-to-date education on how shifts in behavior among Gulf stakeholders and tourists can effect change.



# What We Do

**The Science Integration and Analysis Team and the Partnerships Team work with Gulf of Mexico stakeholders to explore methods to:**

- Support the assessment, development and implementation of programs, projects and tools that strengthen community resilience
- Protect, enhance and restore coastal and upland habitats within the Gulf of Mexico watershed
- Promote and support environmental education and outreach to inhabitants of the Gulf of Mexico watershed
- Restore and/or improve water and habitat quality to meet water quality standards in watersheds throughout the five Gulf states and the Mississippi River Basin

## **Community Liaison Initiative**

A key aspect of the GMP is the Community Liaison Initiative, which strives to enhance the understanding of and appreciation for preserving the Gulf of Mexico in underserved and underrepresented communities. GMP staff who are involved in the initiative are members of the National Council on Aging Senior Environmental Employees Program. They assist both the Partnerships Team and the Science Team as part of the initiative, promoting just environmental practices and calls to action among varying partners in creating resilient communities.

# 4

## Performance Measures

The GMP works with each of the five Gulf Coast states (Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas) and the six Gulf Coast Mexican states on projects that support the following priority areas:



PERFORMANCE MEASURE

### WATER QUALITY

The GMP continuously works with Gulf Coast states to maximize efficiency and utility of water quality monitoring efforts for local managers. The GMP supports efforts to improve water and habitat quality to meet water quality standards throughout the five Gulf states and Mississippi River Basin.

**TARGET:** Improve water quality health indicators  
**RESULT:** Improved indicators in 2 water bodies



PERFORMANCE MEASURE

### HABITAT RESTORATION

Through funding and partnerships, the GMP is restoring habitat in the Gulf states especially related to wetlands, coastal prairies and stream banks corridors. This work helps provide for protection from storm damage; supporting commercial and recreational fisheries; providing nesting and foraging habitat for birds and other wildlife; protecting pollinators; and improving water quality for recreational use and aquatic life.

**TARGET:** Restore 150 acres  
**RESULT:** 702.18 acres restored



PERFORMANCE MEASURE

### ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

These efforts are cornerstones to environmental stewardship. The GMP's goal is to heighten citizens' appreciation of the Gulf, which leads to positive behavior practices. This can be accomplished by developing hands-on environmental initiatives and engaging residents in restoration programs/projects.

**TARGET:** Reach 5,000 individuals  
**RESULT:** 18,662 individuals reached



PERFORMANCE MEASURE

### COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Resilience is the capacity of human and natural systems to adapt to and recover from change. The GMP supports community vulnerability assessments and is taking action to better position their communities to recover from coastal storms and adapt to the impacts resulting from changes in our environment.

**TARGET:** Reach 40 communities  
**RESULT:** 121 communities reached



# Water Quality

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## Sarasota Bay Estuary Program: North Water Tower Park Community Restoration and Education Initiative

**PARTNERS:** North Trail Redevelopment Partnership; Bayou Oaks Neighborhood Association; City of Sarasota; Sarasota County

Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP) and the GMP partnered to address stormwater as a major pollutant at the North Water Tower Park (NWTP), which is a 20-acre park located in North Sarasota, FL. Treatment of this stormwater is vital to protecting the local water body and restoring areas where it has caused adverse environmental impacts. The stormwater draining from the North Trail and adjacent properties was routed through an undersized pipe to a canal. From there, the stormwater flowed into Whitaker Bayou, which is a major tidal tributary into Sarasota Bay. There was very little retention time for the stormwater to soak into the ground.

This project redesigned certain areas to better retain the stormwater in a beneficial way. Bioswales, which are storm runoff conveyance systems that provide an alternative to storm sewers, were designed and planted with native vegetation. By returning the land surface to a more natural setting with the bioswales, the natural connectivity improved habitat and provided better and safer access for the neighborhood.





## University of Alabama: Characterizing and Addressing Contamination from Septic System Effluent in the Lower Black Warrior River Watershed

**PARTNERS:** Alabama Clean Water Partnership; Alabama On-Site Wastewater Treatment Center; Geological Survey of Alabama; Hale County Revitalization Organization; Alabama Department of Environmental Management; Alabama Department of Public Health; University of South Alabama; Georgia Institute of Technology; Environmental Protection Agency Region 4; Down to Earth, Inc.

The University of Alabama’s Department of Civil, Construction and Environmental Engineering and the GMP brought together five major stakeholders to characterize and address one of the great environmental and public health challenges in rural Alabama. The soil and geological conditions and economic realities of the Lower Black Warrior River watershed made it difficult for the operation of on-site wastewater treatment systems, such as residential septic tank systems. Poorly treated or untreated residential wastewater was a major issue and created a hazard for both the local and regional water resources, and more importantly, to the overall public health of the community. Although this issue was widely acknowledged, the scope of the adverse impacts, the geographic areas of the greatest threats, and the feasibility and effectiveness of possible solutions have not been adequately addressed. In addition, the lack of safe and affordable sanitation options for the rural economically disadvantaged creates a major environmental justice issue.



### Turkey Creek: Making a Visible Difference in Community Water Quality Partnership

**PARTNERS:** Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality; Turkey Creek Steering Committee; Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain; Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College; North Gulfport 8th Grade School; EPA Region 4; The Nature Conservancy

As a direct request in “The Community’s Plan for the Turkey Creek and North Gulfport Neighborhoods” to identify pollution sources in the creek and establish regular monitoring, this project was developed and implemented with Turkey Creek partners and builds on the monitoring work MDEQ has conducted to establish a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for fecal coliform in the creek. The GMP is located near Turkey Creek and has the expertise and commitment through its staff scientists, partnerships and emphasis from the EPA Administrator to “Make a Visible Difference” in communities. This project directly supports the communities’ desire to have recreational use of the creek protected.



Over the coming year, bacterial source tracking will be completed in the creek, and continued partnership work with decision makers will help identify and eliminate sources of bacterial pollution in the watershed. Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College Phi Theta Kappa students won an international award for their partnership work in water quality monitoring in the creek with the EPA. More than 100 eighth-grade students directly participated in hands-on weekly water quality monitoring in Turkey Creek, and approximately 500 eighth-grade students participated in water quality and environmental outreach events at North Gulfport 8th Grade School.



# HABITAT RESTORATION

## **Gulf of Mexico Foundation: Will Introduction of Fire along Coastal Gradients Promote Lateral Migration of Marsh and Enhance Biodiversity?**

**PARTNERS:** Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve; University of Alabama; Southern Illinois University; Mississippi Department of Marine Resources; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Texas Region 4 Education Service Center

Two pine islands within the Grand Bay NERR will receive prescribed burning to test if woody species are controlled effectively to allow for vulnerable marsh positive migration (theory being that fire used to control woody species and protect healthy marsh ecosystem). Two other pine islands will not receive burning and will be controls. Ten 100-square-meter plots will be used on each island to determine types of plant species present.

## **Brownsville Public Utilities Board: Cemetery Resaca Restoration Project, Bank Stabilization and Edge and Water Quality Improvements**

**PARTNERS:** City of Brownsville; University of Texas at Brownsville; United Brownsville; Brownsville Historical Association; Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation; Texas Parks and Wildlife

The project involves the restoration of one of Brownsville's many regionally unique wetland areas, which eventually flows into the Brownsville Ship Channel and the Gulf of Mexico. The project leverages a previous \$8 million spent to dredge out accumulated sediment, etc., from resacas (aka oxbow lakes) and wetlands. The project includes bank improvements (e.g., shallow-sloped bank, native vegetation planting and stormwater treatment prior to entering waterways) and uses filtration ponds and buffer areas. Water quality data will be compared with baseline data previously collected to determine water quality change over time. Invasive species, which have largely taken over some areas of the resacas, will be removed.



# ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

## University of Southern Mississippi (USM): Watershed Education Aboard a Research Vessel

### PARTNERS

**School Teachers:** Philadelphia High School; Leflore Magnet High School; Rickards High School; Sumrall High School

**Community Stakeholders:** Steps Coalition; Hijari House; Scientific Research I; Mississippi Coalition for Vietnamese-American Fisherfolks and Families (VAFF)

The GMP and the University of Southern Mississippi at the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory are working together through a cooperative agreement to provide environmental education to enhance watershed literacy in the region to middle and high school students. Students learn the importance of clean water in their daily environment, discuss the behaviors that negatively impact the watershed and work to change those behaviors to improve water quality in their area.

Students also spend a few hours monitoring the overall health of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem on a research vessel. During this activity, the students collect water samples at varying levels, perform water quality tests and document results. The data is interpreted and then disseminated to the local community to report on the ecosystem's overall health and used in discussions on the required salinity, temperature and/or pH of the water to sustain different species of aquatic life.





### Gulf Awareness Patch

The Gulf of Mexico Awareness Patch (Patch) was introduced by the GMP in October 2013 to teach the importance of preserving the ecosystem of the Gulf of Mexico. Students from not only the Gulf states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas, but also states farther up the Mississippi River watershed, can take part in a series of activities designed to develop and increase awareness of the need for ocean stewardship. In addition to providing opportunities to learn about protecting the Gulf and keeping it healthy, GMP staff trains interested educators on facilitating lessons that result in earning the Gulf Awareness Patch.

The Gulf Awareness Patch is used as a tool for outreach and education and can be earned throughout the year at a variety of events, such as community events or summer camps.



## GMP HAPPENINGS

### HYPOXIA IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

The GMP is a key partner in regional and national efforts to reduce the size and impacts of the annual hypoxic zone, or “Dead Zone.” This work is accomplished by addressing the overall occurrence of hypoxia events throughout the Gulf of Mexico, more specifically off the coasts of Louisiana and Texas. Low oxygen levels occur in the marine environment due to numerous factors, including excess nutrient loading (usually nitrogen and phosphorus), which is influenced by humans and nonhumans. Human influences include poorly treated wastewater, resulting from the shortage of wastewater treatment facilities with access to costly nitrogen and phosphorus removal equipment. Nonhuman influences include untreated input from industrialized agriculture, animal farming operations, large scale migration events and other hard-to-pinpoint sources.



### **Weeks Bay Foundation, Inc: A Gulf of Mexico Coastal Training Program Initiative**

**PARTNERS:** National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Coastal Services Center; The Gulf of Mexico National Estuary Programs; Gulf Coast Sea Grant Programs; Gulf of Mexico Alliance Coastal Community Resilience Priority Issue Team; The Society for Ecological Restoration Southeast Chapter; The Southeast Watershed Forum

The Coastal Training Program Coordinators at the five Gulf Coast National Estuarine Research Reserves developed a regional collaborative program offering targeted training and technical assistance to resource managers and decision makers on the Gulf coast. These training events and direct assistance employ proven educational methodologies to increase regional awareness and action on program priorities and strategic goals identified by the GMP and the region's coastal decision makers.

## GMP HAPPENINGS

### **GMP DIRECTOR AND STAFF VISIT THE FLORIDA NEPs**

Ben Scaggs, with staff representatives Lael Butler and John Bowie, along with representatives from Region 4 Felicia Burks and Mark Nuhfer, visited the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program and the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program. The purpose of the visits was to reaffirm the partnership between the Estuary Programs and the GMP, and learn "hands-on" about the projects and programs going on in their



respective areas. The GMP toured the Charlotte Harbor Oyster Restoration project in the Peace River and Robinson Preserve in Tampa Bay, and participated in planting seagrasses at Ken Thompson Park in Sarasota Bay.



# COMMUNITY RESILIENCE



## University of Mississippi: Saving Money and Enhancing Resilience—Assisting Communities Through the 2013 Community Rating System (CRS)

**PARTNERS:** Mississippi Alabama Sea Grant Law and Policy Consortium; Louisiana Sea Grant Program; Mississippi Gulf Coast Coastal Hazard Outreach Strategy Team; Louisiana Southwest Informational Floodplain Team; Blue Urchin; Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve; University of New Orleans Center for Hazards Assessment, Response & Technology

This project provided technical and outreach coordination support and worked closely with local coastal communities participating in the National Flood Insurance Program, facilitating the transition to the 2013 CRS Coordinators' Manual, and provided assistance in maintaining and improving the class rating under the new manual, with emphasis on outreach and on developing a Program for Public Information. The partners worked strategically to develop PPI committees and outreach materials that best addressed the needs of those specific communities participating in the Community Rating System.



### **GMP'S EARTH DAY 2016 EVENT**

Representatives from the GMP marked the 46th observance of Earth Day by educating 200 students at Peter F. Alba Middle School in Bayou La Batre, AL, about the Gulf of Mexico environment. Small groups of students rotated among stations featuring green, hands-on experiences. The activities were carefully chosen to increase environmental literacy of the Gulf of Mexico, promote stewardship and support children's health.

#### **The activities included:**

- **WATER FILTRATION** – students experimented with filtering water using fine sand, coarse sand and gravel.
- **OIL SPILL CLEANUP** – students tried different types of absorbents to absorb oil.
- **ENVIROSCAPE** – students used a coastal model to visualize runoff and its effects on coastal waters.
- **WATER TEST KITS** – students had the opportunity to test water for pH, temperature, clarity, etc.

At the end of the day, the students earned their Gulf of Mexico Awareness Patch.



# DESIGNING FOR IMPACT

## **Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC): Designing for Impact**

**PARTNERS:** Bayou Preservation Association; Galveston Bay Estuary Program; Land/Water Sustainability Forum

This project advances techniques to mitigate the water quality impacts of coastal development within the context of market constraints. The Low Impact Development site plans serve as tangible examples of cost-effective strategies to mitigate the impacts that development has on water quality, wildlife habitat and flooding. The design techniques described will not only be usable in the Houston-Galveston area, but could be used by communities throughout the Gulf of Mexico watershed. The project provides designers, policymakers and developers with tools they can use to support development that is designed, built and managed to preserve valuable natural areas and systems, allowing the region to accommodate a growing population without negatively impacting air quality, water quality or overall community health.

## A COLLEGIATE PARTNERSHIP: MEMORANDUMS OF UNDERSTANDING WITH INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

The GMP developed a collegiate partnership program to increase opportunities for experiential learning and scientific exploration, and to stimulate students' interest in STEM-related careers. The partnerships, formally executed through Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), increase cooperation between institutions of higher learning and the GMP in areas of mutual interest.

Through collegiate partnerships, students' appreciation of the Gulf of Mexico has heightened, and there has become a strong sense of resonance for its preservation. The following projects have resulted from the GMP's work with institutions of higher learning:

- Pearl River Community College and the GMP established an Environmental Day Camp. The camp provided an opportunity for primary school age youth to gain an understanding of the Gulf of Mexico and its resources, and emphasized the importance of recycling as a method to protect marine life and the environment.
- Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, the GMP and state and local partners conducted a weekly monitoring program in Turkey Creek to meet the "Turkey Creek Community Plan." Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society students and North Gulfport eighth grade students worked with the GMP to determine the health of the Turkey Creek Watershed.
- University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Park Campus and the GMP partnered on the use of laboratory space that allows for extensive data analyses. This joint venture will lead to improved water quality and enhanced resiliency of the Turkey Creek community, a marginalized and underserved community vulnerable to environmental pollution.





### Promoting Environmental Justices and Equity in Marginalized and Overburdened Communities

**PARTNERS:** Boat People SOS; Port of Gulfport; Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College; University of Southern Mississippi-Gulf Park Campus and Gulf Coast Research Laboratory; Gulfport Job Corps; Biloxi Housing Authority

A major component of community resilience is engaging vulnerable populations in decisions or actions to improve overall quality of life. The GMP and its partners developed a strategy for ensuring that marginalized and overburdened communities are equipped with certifications and offered math refresher courses, with the goal of sustained and gainful employment. This targeted initiative will bridge employment gaps of displaced shrimpers and fishermen, and allow for re-emergence to the workforce of persons returning to society. The project will increase community sustainability and create a population of stewards who are passionate about progressive movement while maintaining culture practices. A component of this effort is to assess health disparities and to advance understanding of policy impacts or the lack thereof. The GMP and its partners will “Make a Visible Difference” in Mississippi Gulf Coast communities by implementing collaborative and sustained efforts.

#### THE 2016 CELEBRATE THE GULF EVENT

On April 2, 2016, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources’ Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve held an award-winning, one-day family festival called “Celebrate the Gulf” in Pass Christian, MS. GMP employees educated individuals of all ages about the importance of the Gulf of Mexico and the resources it provides to the country. The marine festival is geared toward students, and many visited the GMP’s demonstration area and made mosaics of marine life with recycled CDs and DVDs, and participated in making colored sand art. The very first Celebrate the Gulf Marine Education Festival was funded by a GMP Assistance Agreement. More than 5,000 people attended the event and more than 300 visited the GMP’s presentation area.



# GULF RESTORATION EFFORTS

On April 20, 2010, an explosion on the Deepwater Horizon MC252 drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico caused the rig to sink, and oil began gushing into the Gulf. Eleven crew workers tragically lost their lives in the explosion. The magnitude of this spill was something our nation had not seen before, causing significant impact to wildlife and the fishing community along the coastal areas of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. To date, there have been multiple organizations focused on assisting the five Gulf states in recovering from the damage. The GMP plays a significant role in both Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) and Resources and Ecosystems, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies (RESTORE) recovery initiatives by providing key leadership to the RESTORE Council's Steering Committee, and coordinates engagement of EPA resources (GMP, R4, R6, HQ) on numerous workgroups and implementation of specific projects that will be led by the EPA across the Gulf Coast region and serving on scientific and public engagement NRDA committees.





### NATURAL RESOURCE DAMAGE ASSESSMENT

The Oil Pollution Act authorizes certain federal agencies, states and Indian tribes—collectively known as natural resource trustees—to evaluate the impact of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on natural resources. These trustees comprise officials from the five Gulf states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. Along with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of the Interior and U.S. Department of Agriculture are responsible for studying the effects of the spill through a process known as Natural Resource Damage Assessment.

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill Natural Resource Damage Assessment Trustees settled with BP, the operator of Deepwater Horizon, for damages to natural resources resulting from the spill. The settlement concluded the largest natural resource damage assessment ever undertaken.

The Trustee Council has begun implementing the restoration as laid out in the comprehensive restoration plan.

The trustees recognize the historic significance of this settlement—the largest recovery of damages ever for injuries to natural resources. The settlement is a momentous step toward restoring the Gulf of Mexico, providing an unprecedented amount of funding dedicated to this iconic ecosystem.

This settlement shaped the Programmatic Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan and Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, finalized in February 2016.



### **GULF COAST ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION COUNCIL**

Following the catastrophic 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, Congress passed and the president signed into law the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast Act of 2012 (RESTORE Act). A very important aspect of the RESTORE Act was that it established the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (the Council) and the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund (Trust Fund).

The Council membership includes the governors of the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas, as well as the secretaries of the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Army, Commerce, Homeland Security and the Interior, and the Administrator for the EPA. The U.S. Department of Agriculture currently serves as the chair of the Council. The Council is responsible for helping to restore the ecosystems and economies of the Gulf Coast region by developing and overseeing implementation of a Comprehensive Plan and carrying out other responsibilities. If you are interested in reading more about the Comprehensive Plan, the RESTORE Act or the Council, please visit [www.RestoreTheGulf.gov](http://www.RestoreTheGulf.gov). In addition to carrying out its responsibilities, the Council is committed to public engagement and coordinating with other Gulf Coast restoration initiatives, including the NRDA for the oil spill, to ensure that restoration efforts are community-supported and complementary.



## GULF RESTORATION EFFORTS

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The RESTORE Act dedicates 80 percent of civil penalties paid under the Clean Water Act (CWA) by responsible parties in connection with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill to the Trust Fund, for ecosystem restoration and economic recovery projects and programs in the Gulf Coast region. Of that 80 percent, 60 percent will be administered by the Council as follows:

- The Comprehensive Plan Component provides 30 percent to the Council for projects and programs it selects.
- The Spill Impact Component provides 30 percent to the Gulf states under a formula developed by the Council, in coordination with the five state members, for implementation of Council-approved State Expenditure Plans (SEPs).

On December 9, 2015, the RESTORE Council approved the Initial Funded Priorities List (FPL), using approximately \$180 million in allocated funds from a \$1 billion 2013 settlement with Transocean Deepwater Inc., to focus on 10 key watersheds across the Gulf, concentrating and leveraging funds to address critical ecosystem needs in high priority locations.

Under the Initial FPL, the EPA will lead five projects on the current FPL to work with local stakeholder groups to achieve near-term, on-the-ground ecosystem benefits, while also conducting planning activities designed to build a foundation for future success.



## GULF RESTORATION EFFORTS

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Following is a brief summary of the five projects that were included in the Initial FPL and will be led by the EPA:

**\$5.8**  
MILLION

### **Baseline Flow, Gage Analysis & Online Tool to Support Restoration**

The EPA and the Department of the Interior/U.S. Geological Survey collaborated on developing this comprehensive, large-scale project that focuses on developing and providing vital information on the timing and delivery of freshwater to the streams, bays, estuaries and wetlands of the Gulf Coast region.

**\$2.5**  
MILLION

### **Gulf of Mexico Conservation Enhancement Grant Program**

The EPA will develop and implement the Gulf of Mexico Conservation Enhancement Grant Program (GMCEGP), a funding assistance opportunity to enhance private/public partnerships that support land protection and conservation across the Gulf Coast region. The program will be available to land conservation organizations such as land trusts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and state land preservation agencies across the Gulf Coast region through a competitive grant selection process. The projects and programs funded by the GMCEGP will focus on enhancing land protection and conservation in priority landscapes; improving habitats and water quality on conserved lands; enhancing the understanding of the benefit of land protection to communities through focused outreach and education supporting conservation and stewardship; developing and implementing conservation management plans; restoring and managing critical aquatic shoreline and upland habitat utilizing hydrologic, landscape, vegetation and wildlife management actions; and implementing other water quality and habitat restoration techniques.

**\$2.1**  
MILLION

### **Mobile Bay National Estuary Program**

The EPA will enter into a cooperative agreement with the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) to design, permit and implement a stream restoration project in Twelve Mile Creek, which has been negatively impacted from excessive stormwater runoff and decaying infrastructure, and to remove invasive species in the Three Mile Creek Watershed.



**\$2.1**  
MILLION

### **Tampa Bay Estuary Program**

The EPA will enter into a cooperative agreement with the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP) to support the implementation of seven priority water quality and habitat improvement projects throughout the Tampa Bay Watershed.

#### **The seven projects are:**

- Coopers Point Water Quality Improvement with the City of Clearwater
- Biosolids to Energy with the City of St. Petersburg
- Copeland Park Stormwater Enhancements with the City of Tampa
- Coastal Invasive Plant Removal with Hillsborough County
- Robinson Preserve Water Quality and Habitat Restoration with Manatee County
- Ft. De Soto Recirculation and Seagrass Recovery with Pinellas County
- Palm River Habitat and Water Quality Restoration Phase II with the Southwest Florida Water Management District

**\$2.1**  
MILLION

### **Gulf of Mexico Estuary Program**

The EPA will stand up a place-based estuary program encompassing one or more of the following bays in Florida's northwest panhandle region: Perdido Bay, Pensacola Bay, Escambia Bay, Choctawhatchee Bay and St. Andrews Bay. Although this Estuary Program will be modeled after the structure and operation of National Estuary Programs (NEPs), it will not be a designated NEP. This project will serve as a pilot project for the Council to consider expanding Gulf-wide when future funds become available.



# 2015 GULF GUARDIAN AWARDS

## GULF GUARDIAN AWARDS

The Gulf of Mexico Program developed the Gulf Guardian Awards as a way to recognize and honor the businesses, community groups, individuals and agencies that are taking positive steps to keep the Gulf healthy, beautiful and productive. The Gulf Guardian Awards exemplifies what the GMP is all about: innovative solutions that come about when we pool resources and look for creative ways to positively impact our quality of life and economic well-being.

The first Gulf Guardian Award winners were recognized in 2000. Every year since, a first, second and third place award is given in seven categories:

1. Business/Industry
2. Civic/Non-Profit Organization
3. Partnerships
4. Youth Environmental Education
5. Individual
6. Environmental Justice/  
Cultural Diversity
7. Bi-National

Since 2009, the Gulf Guardian Awards have been presented on a biannual basis. The most recent awards ceremony was held July 30, 2015, at the Texas State Aquarium in Corpus Christi, TX. The winners of the 2015 Gulf Guardian Awards are as follows:





## 2015 GULF GUARDIAN AWARDS

### BUSINESS/INDUSTRY

- 1st place**                      **Storm Water Conservation Program**  
Holcim, Inc., *Theodore, AL*
- 2nd place**                      **GoM Energy Infrastructure Protection through Port Vision Technology and Mariner Education**  
Coastal and Marine Operations Group, *Houma, LA*

### CIVIC/NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

- 1st place**                      **Bayou Auguste Restoration**  
Mississippi State University's Gulf Coast Community Design Studio, *Biloxi, MS*
- 2nd place**                      **Galveston Bay Foundation**  
*Webster, TX*
- 3rd place**                      **Rivers, Lakes, Bays 'n Bayous Trash Bash**  
Texas Conservation Fund & Houston-Galveston Area Council, *Houston, TX*



#### 1ST PLACE BUSINESS/INDUSTRY

From left to right: Stan Meiburg, Acting Deputy Administrator for EPA; Heather McTeer Toney, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 4; Travis Osbourne, Environmental Manager at Holcim, Inc.; and Ron Curry, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 6



#### 1ST PLACE CIVIC/NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

From left to right: Stan Meiburg, Acting Deputy Administrator for EPA; Heather McTeer Toney, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 4; David Perkes, Director of Gulf Coast Community Design Studio; and Ron Curry, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 6



## 2015 GULF GUARDIAN AWARDS

### PARTNERSHIPS

#### 1st place

**Joe's Branch Step Pool Storm Conveyance System**  
Thompson Engineering, Inc. & Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, *Mobile, AL*

#### 2nd place

**Bayou LaFourche Clean Up**  
Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, *Thibodaux, LA*

#### 3rd place

**Tampa Bay Environmental Restoration Fund**  
Tampa Bay Estuary Program and Restore America's Estuaries, *St. Petersburg, FL*

### YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

#### 1st place

**Utag for iTAG**  
Bay Point Elementary School, *St. Petersburg, FL*

#### 2nd place

**Growing Restoration Roots**  
Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, *Thibodaux, LA*



#### 1ST PLACE PARTNERSHIPS

From left to right: Stan Meiburg, Acting Deputy Administrator for EPA; Heather McTeer Toney, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 4; Roberta Swann, Director of Mobile Bay National Estuary Program; Ron Curry, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 6; and Emery Baya, Senior Vice President of Thompson Engineering



#### 1ST PLACE YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

From left to right: Stan Meiburg, Acting Deputy Administrator for EPA; Heather McTeer Toney, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 4; Cory Diaz, student at Bay Point Elementary; Renee Hale, Bay Point Elementary Gifted Teacher; and Ron Curry, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 6



## 2015 GULF GUARDIAN AWARDS

### INDIVIDUAL

#### 1st place

**Tracie Sempier**

MS/AL Sea Grant Consortium & Gulf of Mexico Alliance,  
*Biloxi, MS*

#### 2nd place

**Casi Callaway**

Mobile Baykeeper, *Mobile, AL*

#### 3rd place

**Richard Gragg, Ph.D.**

Florida A&M University, *Tallahassee, FL*

### BI-NATIONAL

#### 1st place

**Sea Turtle Protection Program**

Veracruz Aquarium, *Veracruz, Mexico*

#### 2nd place

**Consortio de Institucioned de Investigación Marina  
del Golfo de México y del Caribe (CiiMAR)**

*Tabasco, Mexico*



#### 1ST PLACE INDIVIDUAL

From left to right: Stan Meiburg, Acting Deputy Administrator for EPA; Heather McTeer Toney, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 4; Tracie Sempier, MS/AL Sea Grant Consortium and Gulf of Mexico Alliance; and Ron Curry, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 6



#### 1ST PLACE BI-NATIONAL

From left to right: Stan Meiburg, Acting Deputy Administrator for EPA; Anelmo Estandía Colom, CEO of Acuario de Veracruz; Heather McTeer Toney, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 4; Victor Alvarado Martínez, Secretary of State, Veracruz State Environmental Ministry; and Ron Curry, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 6



## 2015 GULF GUARDIAN AWARDS

### ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE/CULTURAL DIVERSITY

- 1st place**                      **Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizing, Inc. (BISCO)**  
*Thibodaux, LA*
- 2nd place**                      **Center for Environmental and Economic Justice**  
*Biloxi, MS*
- 3rd place**                      **"We Love Cajun Music"**  
**Cajun Music Preservation Society, *Thibodaux, LA***



#### 1ST PLACE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE/ CULTURAL DIVERSITY

From left to right: Stan Meiburg, Acting Deputy Administrator for EPA; David Gauthe, Organizer of Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizing, Inc.; Heather McTeer Toney, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 4; Sharon Gauthe, Director of Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizing, Inc.; and Ron Curry, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 6



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